

Closure

Continued from Page 1A

For many of them, Tyson has been their first and only employer, and they are nervous about navigating unemployment in the U.S. for the first time. They say they don't know what social benefits they qualify for, how to apply and who they can turn to for help.

They also say Tyson hired them at a good wage despite their lack of skills and inability to speak English and worry whether other employers could provide similar opportunities and chances to learn.

Jan Flora, emeritus professor of sociology at Iowa State University who has co-authored books on the impact of immigrants on rural communities, said the meatpacking industry has long relied on immigrants and refugees to build up its workforce.

They come in large numbers and are "willing to do the work" at rates that no longer appeal to native-born applicants, Flora said. But mass layoffs like Tyson's leave already marginalized groups even more vulnerable, said Nicole Novak, research assistant professor at the University of Iowa's Department of Community and Behavioral Health.

"Research has found that workers who have a harder time transitioning to other industries – often this is older workers – are especially at risk for symptoms of depression and other mental health concerns after an involuntary job loss," Novak said. "Workers who face other barriers to switching industries, such as language barriers, may need extra support to find meaningful and sustainable employment after losing a packing plant job."

Tyson plant closure will leave big hole in diverse community of Perry

Tyson Foods announced its plans last month to permanently close the pork packaging plant in Perry by June 28. Tyson is the city's largest employer, and its departure will leave 1,276 people without jobs and a small town in distress.

The company has transformed Perry into one of the most diverse and fastest-growing communities in Iowa. Nearly 70% of employees at the Tyson location in Perry are Black and Latino, said Roger Kail, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1149, which represents 700 to 800 of the plant's workers. Women make up close to 40%, data provided by Kail shows.

Those figures mirror Tyson's workforce across the U.S., made up of more than 60% minority groups and 39% women, according to a 2023 annual U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission report from the company.

Close to a third of Perry's 8,000 residents identify as Hispanic or Latino, and almost 19% are foreign born, according to the U.S. Census.

Perry officials recently unveiled PerryNext, a new page on the city's website that lists events, career services and other resources for workers impacted by

the closure. It's one of many efforts rolled out by leaders looking to ease the transition and search for a new job.

A Tyson spokesperson said in an email that "we understand the impact of our decision on our team members and the local community" and are working with local and government agencies in Perry. Officials encourage "all affected employees" to consider positions within the company, the spokesperson said. Assistance will be provided for individuals who choose to relocate to another facility.

A collective bargaining agreement between union and Tyson leaders, obtained by the Register, outlines benefits available for workers who physically relocate to Tyson's Waterloo plant. Of 75 available jobs, 15 are for general maintenance positions. The remaining 60 are for "hourly frontline team members," but the agreement doesn't otherwise specify the type of work involved.

Employees who accept a position and move to Waterloo will be eligible to receive \$10,000 from Tyson. The first \$5,000 will be given after a month of employment at the new location, while the other half will be given after one year of employment, the agreement says. Up to \$5,000 also will be offered to alleviate any moving costs. And the company will provide help enrolling children in school and child care.

For workers who relocate to plants other than Waterloo, housing assistance will be offered.

The company says it will retain employees' seniority for health benefits, vacations and holiday pay. These offers are available through June 28, the agreement says.

A spokesperson declined to comment on the details of the bargaining agreement and assistance it would provide employees impacted by the Perry plant's closure.

Calderon said there's no way he could make the commute to Tyson's other locations when the nearest ones to Perry are still far away. The facility in Storm Lake is about an hour and 50-minute drive, while the one in Waterloo is just over two hours.

Uprooting his family is an unrealistic option, he said.

'How am I going to survive?' African refugee asks after layoff news

Employees Kilozo Amisi and Jose Mosengo also were caught off-guard by the news. They said they feel unprepared to handle the uncertainty that lies ahead.

Amisi and Mosengo each came as refugees from Africa less than a decade ago. They became financially stable and independent because of Tyson.

Mosengo, who came to the U.S. from a refugee camp in Zambia, said he moved to Iowa in October 2017 when he couldn't find work in Las Vegas, Nevada. He was told the Des Moines area had more job opportunities and companies such as Tyson Foods were hiring immigrants and refugees.

Mosengo has worked for Tyson Foods for the last six and a half years and is considered the breadwinner in



Kilozo Amisi, who began working at the Perry Tyson plant in 2019, says it's the only job he's had since coming to America. LILY SMITH/THE REGISTER



Jose Mosengo, a refugee from Africa, says through an interpreter, 'I'm asking myself: 'How am I going to survive?'' LILY SMITH/THE REGISTER

his family. He said he's made good money, which has helped him and his wife pay their bills, including their monthly mortgage and college tuition for their children.

"I'm asking myself: 'How am I going to survive?'" Mosengo told the Rev. Willy Msiando, a local leader in Des Moines' African community, who provided translations from Swahili and Kibembe to the Register.

Msiando, senior pastor at Living Water Evangelical Free Church of Des Moines, and Tricia Gabriel, co-founder of the nonprofit Genesis Youth Foundation, said they empathize with all the workers, many of whom have dedicated years to the Perry packing plant and will soon be let go.

Those jobs helped them find their footing in a new country. The company hired people with varying language skills — an opportunity, Msiando says, that's hard to come by and tough to pass up for immigrants and refugees. Msiando recalled the plant once hiring 11 new arrivals he had referred.

"They're basically starting from scratch to figure out what's next for them," said Gabriel, who also serves as the nonprofit's arts program director.

Mosengo said he's afraid employers will overlook him because of his age and because he has struggled to learn English. He said he also struggles to apply online for jobs.

"I don't know all that technology," he said.

Amisi relayed similar concerns: The 43-year-old said he came to Iowa in 2019 from a refugee camp in Tanzania and immediately began working in Perry at the Tyson facility. It's the only job he's had since coming to America.

'Stay calm, have hope,' one local leader says

In the last few weeks, Gabriel and her husband, Sam Gabriel, have held town hall-style meetings at public libraries for African families impacted by Tyson's closure. The couple, along with other community leaders and partners, listened as workers candidly voiced their concerns. Some participants pitched in, helping usher the conversations and translating responses to English from Swahili and French.

The Gabriels say they understand the fear the families feel. They came to Iowa with their families more than 20 years ago after living in an Ivory Coast refugee camp. They built their nonprofit, which

began with sports and arts programs for refugee children and later expanded to include resources for adults and families.

Sam Gabriel, Genesis' executive director, came to the U.S. in 1997, settling in Des Moines with his parents. He said the rest of his siblings arrived a few years later, and many of them secured their first jobs at the Tyson plant in Perry.

Sam Gabriel said his older brother still works there — his 18-year run will come to an end in June.

Tricia Gabriel remembered first seeing the news about the permanent closure on Facebook. She thought of her brother-in-law and quickly shared the social media post with her husband.

But the couple said they began to more fully understand the closure's impact only after a youth participant told them about her parents, who both work at Tyson and are afraid about what will happen when they lose their jobs.

The Gabriels have teamed up with Iowa Workforce Development to host a series of career fairs, which started April 13.

Sam Gabriel said these events are geared toward Tyson employees who live in Des Moines and will take place every second Saturday of the month at Hope+Elim Church, 2500 University Ave., through July. Genesis Youth Foundation is looking for employers with openings to participate in the fair. Inquiries can be sent to info@genesisyouthfoundation.org, and more information about Genesis can be found online through the organization's website at genesisyouthfoundation.org.

Iowa Workforce Development has already deployed career counselors to Perry through its mobile service. On Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., workforce development staff are posted on Tyson grounds to support employees.

Sam Gabriel said he knows times like these are difficult, but he wants to reassure workers that help is on the way.

"Stay calm, have hope. We, the community as a whole, is working," he said. "There are many committed partners that are working towards making sure no family would become homeless."

Register reporters Kate Kealey and José Mendiola, who provided translations, contributed to this story.

F. Amanda Tugade covers social justice issues for the Des Moines Register. Email her at ftugade@dmreg.com or follow her on Twitter @writefelissa.

Join the FUN! "Deliver the LOVE" to 350 older adults in and around Perry!



Project Deliver the LOVE

Thursday, May 2

- 100 Volunteers Needed
- 1.5 hr Volunteer Shifts
- 9:00AM - 4:30PM
- Perry Lutheran Homes Eden Acres Campus, 1300 28th St, Perry, IA

Volunteer

Assemble and deliver baskets to older adults on Thurs, May 2.

Submit Names

Age 75+ that live in or within 10 miles of Perry to receive a personal visit and basket of LOVE!

Donate

Provide meals to home-bound older adults through Meals on Wheels.



Call: 515-465-5316

Email: info@PerryLutheranHomes.org

Web: PerryLutheranHomes.org/PDL

DID YOU KNOW?

Larry Vodenik

Special to the Chief

Did you know... where and when this photo was taken? This was the April snowstorm of 1973. The red and white building on the left was the Maid-Rite on Willis. Today this is Lou's Restaurant. This was only a couple of years after the big blizzard of 1971. I do not know if it's just global warming or if we are just lucky, but it seems we get off easier now weather-wise. I remember when there were huge piles of snow down second street, waiting to



Did you know... where and when this photo was taken? PROVIDED BY LARRY VODENIK

be removed. I hope Mother Nature is not offended by my memories of

April's past, I for one remember this, but do not miss it.

Dallas County News

HOW TO CONTACT US

Our office: 400 Locust St. Ste. 500, Des Moines, IA 50309.

As a safety measure during the pandemic, the office is not open to in-person business at this time.

Circulation: circulation@amestrib.com

Director of Sales

Chad Giddens
cgiddens@localiq.com

Classifieds/Obituaries

515-465-4666 – DallasNewsObits@Gannett.com

Editor

Allison Ullmann (515) 465-4666
aullmann@theperrychief.com

General News/Sports

news@adelnews.com

Legals

legals@amestrib.com

The Dallas County News (USPS 147-540), is published each Thursday at 400 Locust St. Ste. 500, Des Moines, IA 50309. Dallas County News is the official newspaper of Adel, Iowa, and Dallas County, Iowa.

Copyright: The contents of this newspaper are protected by copyright. Other than for noncommercial, personal use of a limited nature, no part of this publication may be copied OR reproduced in any way without the prior written consent of the publisher.

© 2024 Gannett Co., Inc. All rights reserved.

Circulation: Annual Subscription Rates – In Iowa, \$46; Out of state, \$50. Six Month Rates – In Iowa, \$26; Out of state, \$30. "Easy Pay" option is also available. Please call 515-465-4666. Periodicals postage paid at USPS in Perry, Iowa.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Dallas County News, 7950 Jones Branch Dr., McLean, VA 22107.

Disclaimer: Print delivery available only within the newspaper distribution area. By submitting your address and/or email, you understand that you may receive promotional offers from Gannett and its related companies. You may unsubscribe from receiving any such offers at any time by calling 515-465-4666. The advertised price for the Offer includes the one-time \$3.99 activation fee for new subscribers. The advertised price does not include the charges for any premium editions. Premium editions are published to provide additional information and value to our readers. You agree that you will be charged

up to an additional \$2.00 for each premium edition published and delivered to you during your subscription period, in addition to the cost of your subscription. The length of your subscription will be shortened by the publication of premium editions if those premium editions are delivered to you during your subscription. You may elect to be billed separately for premium editions by contacting Customer Service at 515-465-4666. Thus, unless you elect to be billed separately up to an additional \$2.00 for each premium edition, you agree that the length of your subscription will be shortened in proportion to the value of the number of premium editions published and delivered to you during your subscription period. As an illustrative example, if you select a subscription of up to 12 weeks at a cost of \$48.00, and two premium editions at \$2.00 each are published and delivered to you during that subscription period, your subscription will be shortened by 1 week because the weekly cost of the subscription is \$4.00 per week and the premium edition charges total \$4.00. Depending upon the length of your subscription and the timing of the publication and delivery of premium editions, you will not be charged for any premium editions if none are published and delivered to you during your subscription. As such, in that case only, the length of your subscription will not be shortened. The timing of the publication and delivery of premium editions is variable. There will be no more than four premium editions published during the calendar year. For more information or to cancel your subscription, please call 515-465-4666.